

CPC Minutes of July 17, 2012

A regular meeting of the City Plan Commission (CPC) was held on Tuesday, July 17, 2012 at 4:45 p.m. in the Department of the Planning and Development (DPD) 1st Floor Meeting Room, 444 Westminster Street, Providence, Rhode Island.

Opening Session

Call to order: Chairman Durkee called the meeting to order at 4:46 p.m.

Members Present: Chairman Stephen Durkee, Meredyth Church, JoAnn Ryan, Harrison Bilodeau, Ina Anderson, Andrew Cortes and Christine West

Staff Present: Robert Azar and Choyon Manjrekar

Approval of meeting minutes from June 19th, 2012: Ms. West made a motion seconded by Mr. Bilodeau to approve the minutes. All voted in favor.

Minor Land Development Project

MINOR LAND DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

1. Case No. 12-026MI – 125 Pitman Street

The applicant is seeking preliminary plan approval to construct a 25 unit, five story apartment building. –
for action (Fox Point, AP 15 Lots 408, 410 and 411)

Mr. Manjrekar introduced the proposal to construct a 25 unit apartment building on a lot measuring approximately 26,791 SF with the applicant seeking dimensional adjustments for height and dwelling unit density.

Mr. Mark Rapp introduced the project, which would feature large rental apartment units and other amenities including underground parking. A curved pickup and dropoff area would be located in front of the building with parking in the rear. He said residents could drop people off at the front and have access to the underground parking area through another entrance. The building would be a concrete steel frame structure.

Mr. Azar asked if the applicant would be regrading the land to the rear of the building and encroaching into the pedestrian path. Mr. Rapp said the slope would be graded to match that of the path. A discussion on the site ensued.

Ms. Church asked about the size of the apartments. Mr. Rapp said the three bedroom units were 1,500 SF, the two bedroom units were 1,390 SF and a one bedroom unit was 800 SF. Ms. West said she did not see a reason for the garage doors on the ground floor. She suggested that a ground floor apartment may be more appropriate in that location. Mr. Cortes asked how high the stair tower was allowed to go beyond the roofline. Mr. Rapp said the tower would be a few feet higher to allow access to the roof and roofline. Ms. Ryan said she approved of the design.

Mr. Durkee said he felt there were too many curb cuts on Pitman Street and that the applicant could get rid of the second garage door, which would allow for more basement parking space. Mr. Rapp said the dropoff area would allow renters to be dropped at the front door and allow cars to exit. He said the second garage door was proposed because Wayland Ave. was a one way street. Vehicles travelling on Pitman Street would have to make a loop on Gano Street to use the Wayland Ave. entrance. Mr. Richard Lipsitz, the project engineer, said new curb cuts were not being proposed. The curb cuts were used for the three houses that were on the site.

Mr. Durkee said he felt the garage was unnecessary and something else could be added in that area. Mr. Manjrekar asked Mr. Rapp to talk about traffic to and from the site. Mr. Rapp said that there were previously 3 houses and 13 apartments on site. He said cars did not park on Pitman Street as traffic was mainly for the adjacent shopping area. He said providing access from Wayland Avenue would alleviate traffic flowing onto Pitman Street.

Mr. Manjrekar read out the DPD's findings of fact and recommended that the preliminary plan be approved subject to the conditions contained in the staff report.

Mr. Cortes made a motion seconded by Ms. Church to approve the preliminary plan per the findings of fact and conditions in the DPD's staff report. Ms. West proposed an amendment to permit the applicant to add a 26th unit in place of the garage if desired. Mr. Cortes accepted the amendment seconded by Ms. Church. All voted in favor.

2. Case No. 12-027MI – 66 Huber Avenue

The applicant is seeking preliminary plan approval to construct a 40 unit apartment building.(Manton, AP 80 Lot 894) – for action

Ms. Ryan recused herself and left the meeting.

Mr. Azar introduced the project, which was previously approved by the CPC in 2004. Mr. William Landry, project attorney introduced the project and said the project received relief from the zoning board for development of multifamily housing in an R-2 zone. He said building footings and utilities had been installed on site.

Mr. Brian Poor said the building design was more compact than what was previously presented. An open courtyard was being created to increase greenery. The buildings would be connected by a roofline. A discussion on the site design ensued. Mr. Bilodeau asked what type of sheathing would be used. Mr. Poor said it would be a composite material with clapboards and shingles. Ms. Church asked what type of affordable housing the project would provide. Ms. Carla DeStefano said it would be low income housing. A discussion on the site's development ensued. Mr. Durkee said he felt the windows shown on the elevations were small. Mr. Poor said the size of the windows was determined based on the energy code.

State Senator Frank Cicconne said the development would cause traffic congestion. He said the original project was intended for condominium units, not rental housing. Mr. Azar said that zoning does not take the ownership of units into account. Mr. Cicconne said he was concerned about parking issues. Mr. Poor said that the amount of parking provided was in excess of what was required by the Zoning Ordinance. Mr. Cicconne said he felt that all residents were not contacted to attend the public meeting held by the applicant. Mr. Bernard Treml said he opposed the project because of the traffic the project would generate. He said the previous project had underground parking and did not have surface parking. State Representative Hull said he objected to the project and felt that area residents were not involved in the project. He said the CPC should involve more people in the development process.

Ms. Anderson asked what the current condition of the site was. Mr. Hull said it was in poor shape. Ms. Anderson said that the development may be an improvement over the current condition of the site. Ms. DeStefano said she had worked with Councilman Correia for community outreach and the invitations did not come directly from the applicant. She said there was a productive discussion at the community meeting. She said that most residents would have one car, which would not cause traffic issues. The area was walkable with many amenities within walking distance, so vehicular traffic would not pose an issue. A discussion on the development and public participation ensued.

Mr. Landry said that the original design did not have underground parking, but parking on the sides of the building. He said zoning relief was granted based on a traffic study presented to the zoning board. There couldn't be fewer units as the project depended on federal financing. Mr. Cortes asked if the applicant had received relief from the zoning board prior to appearing before the CPC. Mr. Azar said the project may have come before the CPC with the variance. Mr. Cortes said if the variance was previously granted, discussion of density would not be within the CPC's purview. However, he said that issues with the development needed to be addressed by the applicant.

Ms. DeStefano said part of the development plan was to work with the community. She said she had worked with communities after developing projects in other parts of the City and would do the same with this one. She said she had provided private attention to immediate neighbors. A discussion on the project ensued.

Mr. Bilodeau said that he could support the project as long as there was ongoing community participation. Ms. West said communication should be a part of the development process. Mr. Cortes said he was aware of other successful public outreach programs conducted by the applicant, but that he would be comfortable with some public outreach process taking place prior to final plan approval. Ms. DeStefano said that issues would be discussed with neighbors, but some things like school bus routes would not be affected as a result of the development. Mr. Cortes said he would feel comfortable if the applicant could outline a plan of public engagement. Ms. Anderson said she felt it would be in the interest of the neighborhood to have the site developed instead of staying vacant. Mr. Durkee said he wanted to make sure that lighting did not intrude onto neighboring properties. Mr. Poor said lighting would be directed from the building with downward facing light fixtures. He said the light poles were dark sky compliant. He submitted cut sheets of the light fixtures. Mr. Durkee said the number of apartments may not be altered through the outreach process, but there may be opportunities for more outreach.

Mr. Manjrekar read out the DPD's staff report, which found the development to be in conformance with the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Ordinance.

Mr. Bilodeau made a motion seconded by Ms. West to approve the preliminary plan subject to the DPD's findings of fact and conditions of approval. Mr. Cortes proposed an amendment to the motion for the applicant to present a neighborhood outreach plan to the CPC. Mr. Bilodeau accepted the amendment seconded by Ms. West. All voted in favor.

Adjournment

Mr. Bilodeau made a motion seconded by Ms. Church to adjourn the meeting. All voted in favor. The meeting adjourned at 6:19 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Choyon Manjrekar,

Recording Secretary